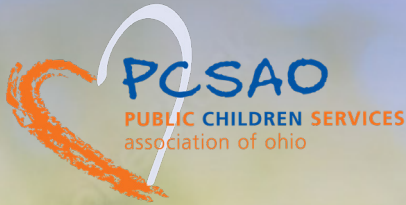




# PCSAO Annual Report

Safe Children  
Stable Families  
Supportive Communities





# Looking Back, Moving Forward

## *Leadership Insights from 2024*

I am honored to serve as the 28th president of this association. As PCSAO celebrates its 45th year advocating for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities, our mission is more critical than ever.

Thanks to the leadership of Gov. Mike DeWine and the support of the Ohio General Assembly, we have made strides in safely reducing the number of children who come into protective custody. Yet workforce shortages persist, and we lack appropriate treatment and placement options for the growing number of children with complex needs coming into our system.

I continue to find hope and inspiration in the resiliency of our families, the dedication of our workers, and the innovation of my peers across the state who come together to make this association so successful.



**Amy Frame,**  
PCSAO President  
Director, Perry County Job &  
Family Services

In 2024, I marked 10 years leading this association. I am proud that over the course of that decade we have engaged every single county children services agency in the state as a PCSAO member, grown our staff and resource base to provide quality technical assistance, and achieved significant new investments to support children, families, and our workforce.

Through the association's leadership and partnership with the new Department of Children and Youth, Ohio is building a stronger continuum of care. We are developing a pipeline for the child protection workforce and professionalizing treatment-level foster caregivers, expanding a key evidence-based practice, and identifying new trauma-informed models for serving children so that they don't have to spend the night at a county agency.

The work is far from complete, but I am so proud that the hard work of our staff, board, and membership has made a difference in the lives of Ohio families.



**Angela Sausser, MA, MSW, LSW**  
PCSAO Executive Director



# Overview of Accomplishments

Ohio's county children services agencies work with families every day, helping meet basic needs, addressing mental health and addiction challenges, and walking arm in arm so that they can grow, heal and recover. Agency leaders and workers protect children while strengthening ties within the extended family and community. And PCSAO helped them to do all of this and more in 2024.



PCSAO Partner of the Year **Kara B. Wentz**, Director of the Ohio Department of Children and Youth (left), with PCSAO Executive Director **Angela Sausser**

## Annual Conference



**Onita Morgan-Edwards**, keynote speaker



### This Is Us: The Child Protection Team

PCSAO ANNUAL CONFERENCE Sept. 9-11, 2024

- The 2024 PCSAO Annual Conference, “**This Is Us: The Child Protection Team**,” brought together more than 500 child protection professionals, including staff from 76 member agencies, and featured 32 workshops, two keynote speakers, and [16 awards](#) honoring the accomplishments of youth, families, staff, and advocates. The conference was made possible thanks to the generous support of Aetna OhioRISE, Case Western Reserve University’s Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Center of Excellence, and 48 other corporate sponsors.

### Program Excellence

- Expanded **Ohio START** – Gov. Mike DeWine’s signature program to help families impacted by substance use and child maltreatment remain together while they recover – to 56 counties
- Launched Ohio’s new shared practice model, **Practice in Action Together (PACT)**, in eight counties
- Expanded the Ohio Fellowship Program – a workforce pipeline that engages college student Fellows part-time in agencies with the goal of employment after they graduate – across three regions of the state
- Hosted an extraordinary **three-day conference** and a one-day **Ohio START Summit** that brought together caseworkers, supervisors, and others for training, networking, and awards

### Public Policy

- Advocated for sound public policy before the Ohio General Assembly, including testimony on five bills
- Engaged member agencies to host more than a dozen legislative ridealongs to educate policy makers and state leaders on issues facing the child protective services system and the families served
- Presented before U.S. House of Representatives Ways & Means Committee staffers on the value of prevention programs like Ohio START for families involved with child protection due to parental substance use
- Influenced key rule revisions to ensure that policy supports improved outcomes for children and families – and minimizes unnecessary requirements on public agencies
- Secured policy change that makes caseworker hiring and retention more flexible

### Public Value

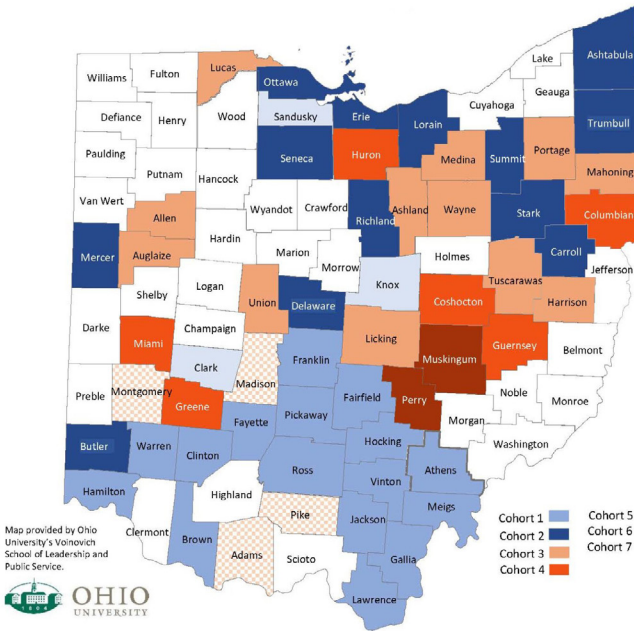
- Launched a new weekly podcast, **3,000 Good Things**, to lift up positive stories about the impact of children services
- Improved the public’s understanding of the work that county agencies and their staff do every day through media coverage of key issues, including the [youth behavioral and mental health crisis](#), [expansion of the Treatment Foster Home Pilot Program](#), [interviews with parents who completed Ohio START](#), [Ohio’s new children services practice model](#), and [how PACT is redefining relationships in child protection](#)
- Worked with media to leverage a story about Ohio’s treatment foster home pilot into a [National Public Radio segment](#)
- Helped county agencies track and win local children services levies
- Supported the statewide Wear Blue campaign
- Launched an updated, interactive website



Ohio Sobriety Treatment and Reducing Trauma (START) is a children services-led initiative that has been shown, when implemented with fidelity, to improve outcomes for both parents and children affected by child maltreatment and parental substance use disorders. Originally introduced as a pilot project in Ohio in 2017, Ohio START has since expanded its reach to 56 counties, positively impacting more than 2,600 children.

## Ohio START Achievements

- Two counties – Fairfield and Ottawa – achieved national certification, bringing the total number of certified counties to five
- The seventh cohort of participating counties launched in May, and a new round of those beginning pre-implementation began in October – bringing the total number of participating counties to 56
- The evidence-based practice of Motivational Interviewing took center stage in training, helping START workers and peer mentors learn positive engagement strategies for families
- The START team hosted a successful Summit in May, role-specific learning communities, and a resilience network to help staff cope with job stress
- An ongoing partnership with Kinnect to Family helped enhance family engagement by identifying backup caregivers, increasing the number of relatives identified at the beginning of service from 6 to 95



Number of New Cases/  
Families Enrolled  
**189**  
(569 Individuals)

Total Number of Open Cases  
(New + Continuing)  
**689**  
(2,123 Individuals)

Number of Successful  
Closures  
**82**  
(Out of 129 Closed  
Cases in 2024)

Average Number of Family Peer  
Mentor Visits  
Per (New) Case  
**21.1**

Average Length of Family Peer  
Mentor Visits  
Per (New) Case\*  
**66.06 minutes**

\*texts, emails and secondary contacts excluded

**904**  
adults

+

**787**  
children (0-5)

+

**432**  
youth (6-18)

=

**2,123**  
Total Individuals  
Served in 2024

For cases that closed in 2024,  
average months of  
sustained sobriety at  
program closure:  
**6.83 Months**  
(range: 0-28 months)





## Ohio START Success Stories

**K**ristine and Stan attended treatment and consistently met with their Butler County START caseworker and family peer mentor who helped them achieve their goals while keeping their child safely in their home throughout the process. They were each able to achieve and maintain sobriety, leading their case to close successfully. When asked about their time in Ohio START, Kristine reported, "Thanks to the START program, my family has been able to stay happy, healthy (physically and mentally), SOBER, and together. The overwhelming support we received throughout our entire journey through START has been such a huge blessing and we are forever grateful for the opportunity we were given to participate."

**A** Stark County father and his family were profoundly impacted by their START caseworker and family peer mentor. The father said, "I felt defeated. But thanks to God's will and unmatched timing, he introduced us to the two best caseworkers we could've asked for. Slowly my confidence, ambitions and discipline started coming back and I could finally see a light at the end of the tunnel. I feel like we've matured and grown as a family in so many ways since our first encounter. We appreciate all the heart to hearts, the tears and the smiles. I 100% have a changed perspective on the system, not because of them, because of you two. I am forever thankful we got lucky enough to cross paths with you guys."



**I**n June 2022, Summit County had a client graduate from Ohio START. It was a challenge at times to get her to the point of consistent sobriety, but once she got there, she never turned back. Two years later in June 2024, the Summit County START team learned that graduate now works in recovery, recently bought a house, expanded her family, and is about to celebrate three years in recovery. She is loving her life and expressed thanks for her START team never giving up on her, emphasizing that her START worker and FPM saved her life.



2024 Ohio START Champion of the Year **Cara Finney** (right) with START consultant **Pam Meermans** (left)

# PACT

Practice in Action Together (PACT) was developed by—and for—children services staff and families as Ohio’s shared practice model. Rooted in four foundational values, the model is designed to elevate healing and build relationships with an implementation strategy aimed at providing all caseworkers with the supports and skills needed to work in partnership with families to solve the challenges they face.



PACT is Ohio’s new shared practice model. Its vision is equity; its purpose is to elevate healing and build relationships. Eight county agencies were selected to be part of Cohort 1.

- Agency staff were trained and encouraged to drive local implementation
- Each formed Local Advisory Groups composed of staff and families working together, with 62 staff and 52 family members engaged across all sites
- Kaye Implementation & Evaluation provided evaluation support, co-designing strategies for measuring relationships with families receiving services, and assistance publishing the [Behavioral Research Project Brief](#)
- [3,000 Good Things](#), a weekly podcast designed to spotlight meaningful interactions between workers and families, debuted its first season of 17 episodes
- A Leadership Affinity Group formed to support leader-driven practice change



**WE BELIEVE** families define “family,” and they are experts on their culture, beliefs, and experiences.

**WE BELIEVE** families have diverse needs, and by partnering with them, we can work together to address those needs.

**WE BELIEVE** families develop trust when we are honest and inclusive in the decision-making process.

**WE BELIEVE** families can recover, heal, and grow.

Athens County Children Services has taken a strategic and intentional approach to developing their Local Advisory Group and PACT implementation approach, partnering caseworkers and families to support one another in their learning and growth.

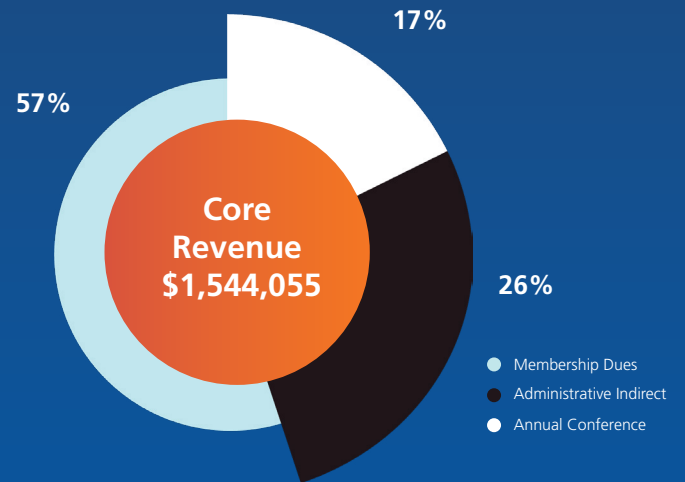
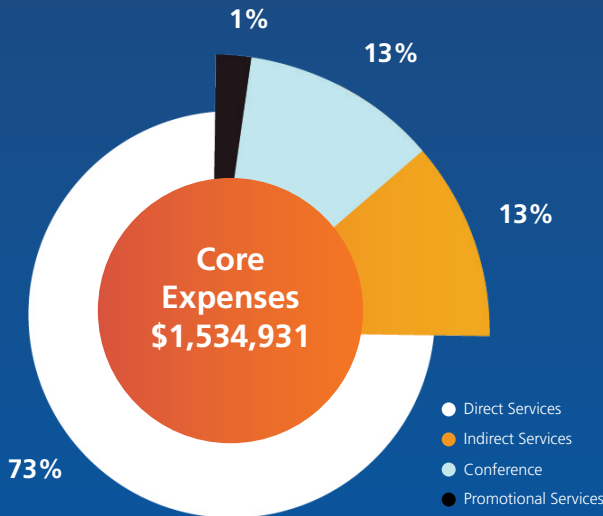
*“We are on a healing journey. A journey that is mission driven, and value shared. A journey that allows us to listen to one another, respect one another, and be real with one another. Protecting children, strengthening families, securing futures — together, through our practice.”*

— Wendy Shields, Deputy Director  
Athens County Children Services



Athens County PACT Advisory Group members (left to right): caseworker Erica Lammers, parent Catrina Tolley, Deputy Director Wendy Shields, Executive Director Otis Crockron

# Administration



## Grants and Donations beyond Core Operations

Ohio Department of Job & Family Services - Ohio START  
 Case Western Reserve University - Center of Excellence  
 Federal Funds (via OMHAS and DCY)  
 Other Grant Revenue and Donations

## Expenses

\$ 1,946,929  
 \$ 140,000  
 \$ 47,846  
 \$ 31,897

**\$ 2,166,672**

## Board of Trustees

**Amy Frame**  
 President  
 Perry County Job & Family Services

**Julie Gilbert, MSSA**  
 Vice President  
 Butler County Job & Family Services

**Heidi Burns**  
 Treasurer  
 Morgan County Job & Family Services

**Kristen Fox Berki**  
 Secretary  
 Lorain County Children Services

**Stacy Cox**  
 Past President  
 Champaign County Job & Family Services

**Melanie Allen**  
 Sandusky County Job & Family Services

**Tania Burnett, LISW-S**  
 Ashtabula County Children Services

**Otis Crockron**  
 Athens County Children Services

**Rachel Ketterman**  
 Columbiana County Job & Family Services

**AJ Lill**  
 Erie County Job & Family Services

**Jed McCoy**  
 Coshocton County Job & Family Services

**Randall Muth, JD**  
 Lucas County Children Services

**Sarah Newland, JD**  
 Allen County Children Services

**Rebecah Sorrell**  
 Preble County Job & Family Services

**Richard Tvaroch**  
 Mahoning County Children Services

**Sue Ware, MS**  
 Union County Human Services

**Jerry Coleman, JD**  
 Ex Officio  
 Stark County Job & Family Services

## Staff

**Angela Sausser, MA, MSW, LSW**  
 Executive Director

**Scott Britton**  
 Assistant Director

**Fawn Gadel, JD**  
 Director of Ohio START

**Mike Kenney**  
 Director of Strategic Initiatives

**Mary D. Wachtel, MSW**  
 Director of Public Policy

**Lisa M. Fry**  
 Operations Manager

**Jen McClellan, PhD, LISW-S**  
 Evaluation and Performance Manager

**Jennifer Millisor, MPA**  
 Ohio START Regional Manager

**Christine Morris**  
 Ohio START Regional Manager

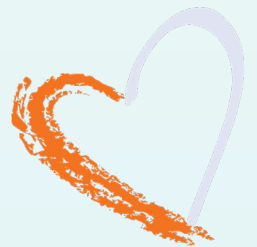
**Anne Potts**  
 Communications and Events Manager

**Ashley Roy**  
 Initiatives Manager

**Ghadir Amin**  
 Initiatives Coordinator

**Lysette Arnold**  
 Policy and Operations Coordinator

**Lara LaRoche, MSW, LISW-S**  
 Practice Implementation Special Advisor





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Supportive Communities



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